

## THE BEGINNINGS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION, 1790-1840.

One of the most interesting chapters in North Carolina history is the fifty years' agitation which preceded the enactment of the first public school law. These two volumes are the result of a desire to put the story of that agitation and the educational ideals of the people of that day in convenient form for the use of students of our social and economic history. Introductory note

Much of the material herein brought together has never before been published, or, if published, has remained inaccessible to all except a very few. This material is practically complete. The documents are printed as they were written, mistakes and all. Whenever a paper could not be found, there is a note telling as much.

In the summary which follows, I have tried to put in concise form what I conceive to be the meaning and the substance of the documents. It is my hope that this summary may not prove wholly uninteresting to the general reader, and that it may call the attention of students to the importance of this phase of North Carolina history.

### I. Educational and Economic Conditions.

In 1790, North Carolina was the third State of the Union in population, having at that time a total population of 393,751, of which 73.2 per cent was white. In 1840, the State had fallen to seventh in population, having then a population of 753,419, of which 64.4 per cent was white. In 1790, the total expenses of the State government were only \$41,480, and \$24,000 of that sum was the cost of the legislature. As late as 1835, the actual expenses of the State government were a little less than \$87,000 and the legislature cost \$40,000. Governor Swain,<sup>1</sup> in his message to the legislature of 1833, said that "the apathy which has pervaded the legislation of half a cen-

Population 1790 and 1840; expenses of State government.  
Narrow bounds of legislation.

<sup>1</sup> P. 652.